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This review examines 18 selected documents processed through the ERIC system dealing with research findings, procedures, and innovations in school-community relations. Although documents reviewed emphasize a variety of issues bearing on school-community relations--including citizen participation, mass media, public relations, voter support, power structure, and school personnel roles--the general area of communication between the school and various segments of the community is a common concern of the literature. (JH)

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School-Community Relations

by Philip K. Piele

The purpose of this review is to examine a select number of documents received and processed by this and other clearinghouses in the ERIC system dealing with research findings, procedures, and innovations in school-community relations. The documents reviewed cover a variety of issues bearing on school-community relations: citizen participation, mass media, superintendent role, board of education role, power structure, and public relations.

The review is based on abstracts of the documents which appeared in *Research in Education*, ERIC's monthly index and abstract catalog. All but two of the documents are available from the ERIC Document Reproduction Service. Complete instructions for ordering these documents are given at the end of the review.

Use of Family Aids Evaluated

Leo B. Hicks[1] reports on an experiment in which family community aids were used in disadvantaged East St. Louis schools in an effort to bridge the communication gap between the school and the home. Nonprofessional aids received 16 weeks of training to perform auxiliary, noninstructional service and to act as liaison personnel between school and community. The aids also made home visits, conducted surveys, and provided the parents with information about school programs and personnel and services available from social agencies. Mass media were employed to inform the parents about what the schools were doing for disadvantaged students and their families. An evaluation of aid activities indicated that they established good rapport with teachers and the community but were not successful in changing the negative parent attitudes about student-teacher relations and the educational quality of the schools.

Richard F. Carter[2] and his associates at the Institute for Communication Research at Stanford University conducted an extensive study on the structure and process of school-community relations. In Volume I of the study, *Informal Communication about Schools*, Carter analyzes over 2,000 reconstructed conversations by 50 adults in each of five school districts. Questionnaire response data were obtained to measure flows of information and influence from the school to the community for obtaining public support. The study attempted to identify (1) persons who talk about schools, (2) the kinds of persons who engage in different amounts and kinds of conversation, (3) relationships between flows of information and influence, (4) the different ways people carry on conversations, and (5) networks of informal communications that exist in school districts. Each respondent was scored for conversation scope, initiative, direction, influence, conduct, and content. Two-thirds of the informal communicators were found to be school parents, one-sixth school people, and one-sixth other (preschool parents, private school parents, postschool parents, and nonparents). Both information and influence flows appear to be the sum of numerous informal social encounters, with no coherent structure characterizing communication channels.

Volume II of Carter's[3] study, *Between Citizens and Schools*, analyzes a 1964 national quota-probability sample of interviews with 1,500 citizens 21 years of age or older. Major variables were defined relating to communication between public schools and their communities. The primary content of the communication process studied was financial support for schools. Six out of seven citizens interviewed thought children were not getting all they should out of education, either for eventual economic benefits or for social and intellectual competencies. Communication by mediating agencies was found to be relatively ineffective. Newspapers were most successful, followed by television, radio, school board, parent organization, and citizens committees. While public school parents participated in school affairs more often than other parental status groups, overall citizen participation was low, with three out of four respondents saying nothing could increase their interest in school matters. Eleven suggestions are made for increasing communication effectiveness in securing public support for public education, with special emphasis on formality, content, and timing.

In Volume III, *The Structure of School-Community Relations*, Carter[4] evaluates structural components of school-community relations. Eight hundred and sixty variables were defined from the literature and grouped into 26 divisions for assessment against four summary criterion variables: (1) acquiescence, the degree to which voters in a school district view financial issues favorably; (2) participation, the degree to which voters exercise their right of review by voting; (3) understanding, the degree to which informed observers similarly perceive school-community relations; and (4) quiescence, the degree to which controversy and conflict are lacking in the school district. Factor analyses of questionnaire responses, census data (1940, 1950, and 1960), and school records identified 256 variables as significantly related to one or more of the four criterion variables. Although the structural analysis served primarily as a basis for subsequent process analysis described in the next volume, practical uses of the study's identification of key structural variables include both the diagnosis and the solving of problems in school-community relations.

In Volume IV, *The Process of School-Community Relations*, Carter[5] focuses on the nature of the interaction process between schools and their communities. Employing standard statistical measurement techniques, including factor analysis, correlations among the four criterion variables (described in the previous paragraph) were determined, as well as correlations of the minor variables with each of the criterion variables. Based on the study's findings, suggestions were made for effective use of patterns of support and nonsupport for schools.

In Volume V, Carter[6] summarizes the four technical studies of the nine-year research project. Each summary report includes: (1) a short introduction describing the purpose of the particular study, the theoretical framework within which the study was formulated, and the methods used to collect the data; (2) a brief account of the more important findings from the study; and (3) implications of the study for the conduct and further study of school-community relations.

Improving School-Community Relations

In a monograph written for the *Successful School Administration Series*, Gene C. Fusco[7] discusses ways for improving a school district's school-community relations program. In Section I of this monograph, "Organizing the Program," Fusco asserts that the American public school must depend for its strength on the support of the local citizens who understand school affairs. The task of interpreting school affairs to the public is an administrative function and requires both information programs and enlistment of community support.

In Section II, "Working with Organized Groups," Fusco[8] suggests that working with organized groups can be an effective way of

improving school-community relations. Under proper conditions, two types of organized efforts have proved successful: parent-teacher groups and citizens committees for better schools. Basic to the wise use of organized citizens groups is the need for the school staff to have knowledge about and to participate in community life. Administrators can vitalize parent-teacher groups by influencing the choice of effective leaders, encouraging the adoption of sound objectives, helping to develop balanced programs, and teaching the groups techniques of planning. Citizens committees can be made more effective if school systems cooperate in fact finding, policy and program development, and development of public support over a wide range of problems.

In the first paper of a panel,[9] Aaron Brown briefly reviews some issues of parent-community involvement in the schools. Brown notes the increasing community concern with better teacher preparation and performance, quality integrated education, and various current educational strategies and practices. He points out that the principal is a key to the success or failure of parent-community involvement. Harry Gottesfeld states that ghetto residents have the greatest understanding of factors influencing the child's life and school behavior, and, therefore, community people can offer considerable knowledge to teacher education. Gottesfeld outlines six productive roles for community residents in teacher education and in the schools. Don Watkins says that low-income communities can explain the demographic characteristics of poverty areas to teacher trainees, involve them in area activities, and offer them direct personal experiences with the poor. He urges that school systems guarantee parent-community involvement in decision making before teachers are placed in the schools and that adult education courses train residents for various professional jobs. Elliott Shapiro, in summarizing the panel papers, adds his criticism of the "aloofness and smugness" of the establishment and suggests that trainees be taught how to cope with the establishment.

In the second edition of a 1959 study, Gordon McCloskey[10] examines the implications of recent research and modern communication media for public moral and financial support for schools. Citizen support of education depends largely on the availability and discussion of pertinent information. Based on the principle that citizens have a right to be informed and on the evidence that free people award their support to matters they understand and value, procedures are outlined by which administrators, teachers, and school boards can create genuine public understanding, including ways of establishing effective working relationships with the media of newspapers, television, and radio. Values and limitations of school publications are analyzed and production techniques are summarized. While administrators are primarily responsible for achieving public understanding of education, teachers play a vital role in working with pupils, parents, organizations, and mass media to gain appreciation of the functions and values of schooling. In their relationship with the school superintendent, school board members make a special contribution to public understanding. A case study illustrates how a school administrator in a typical community can utilize the facts and ideas presented in the study.

Parental Grievances Studied

To aid in the explanation of parent-school relationships, Kent M. Jennings[11] analyzed the development, nature, and handling of parental grievances. Interviews with students and parents provided data with which to examine the following five major problems: (1) the distribution of grievances, (2) the student-parent transmission of grievances, (3) the relation of grievances to school affairs, (4) the substance of grievances, and (5) the redress of grievances. The findings of the study were that (1) 13 percent of the parents interviewed had grievances with course content, (2) 27 percent of the parents had grievances with "other events" at school, (3) schools classified as controversy prone were positively correlated with higher grievance rates, (4) students and parents reported specifically perceived grievances at nearly the same frequency, (5) student-parent relationships and differentiated roles of the mother and father determined the interpretation of transmitted grievances, and (6) 58 percent of the course content grievances occurred in the area of religion and politics.

Chester Gromacki[12] conducted a study of current practices of lay advisory committees. Lay advisory committees, which may be general in nature or may direct their attention to specific programs, are organized to advise and counsel school administrators and to make suggestions or recommendations for guidance for state or local boards. They provide the two-way communication between the school and the community which is essential to all educational programs. The decision to establish an advisory committee must come from a properly constituted authority and should follow consideration of the committee's purpose, membership qualifications, size, and operation. The second part of Gromacki's study is a sample handbook for advisory committees, with sections on functions, types, establishment procedures, effective use of committees, responsibilities of school representatives, conduct of meetings, and followup of meetings.

Gerald W. Pinson[13] evaluated features of the public relations programs of member schools of the East Texas School Study Council and compared them with the standards of eight current texts on school public relations. Major recommendations to improve school public relations programs include (1) appointment of a staff member with responsibility to develop school-community relations, (2) organization of programs with specific longrange plans, (3) increased representation of principals and teachers in civic speaking assignments, (4) regular publication of a school paper, (5) publication of an annual report, and (6) effective participation by administrators and teachers to increase the usefulness of parent-teacher associations.

Voter Support of School Finances

William R. Odell[14] conducted a study to determine whether or not voters would give financial support to educational projects if they were fully informed of needs, and whether current communication techniques were adequate in effectively informing the public of school needs. Specific voter and community characteristics were explored as related to educational understanding. Such factors as socioeconomic problems, attitudinal and behavioral characteristics, communications techniques, and methods to increase lay participation in school activities were included. Research was conducted over a three-year period. The survey results indicated that the public views the schools as the producers of a product, the trained child. It was found that the schools fall short of complete satisfaction because of the competitiveness of society and the high aspirations held for their children by parents. Conclusions show that local community leaders and persons responsible for education should strive for greater understanding. Ways to achieve their mutual goals are summarized.

In a report[15] prepared by the Texas Education Agency in Austin, Texas, suggestions for conducting school bond campaigns are outlined. One of the first steps an administrator should take is to evaluate factors important for the selling of bonds: (1) stimulate interest in investment dealers, thereby increasing competition for bonds; (2) prepare a complete and accurate prospectus; (3) circulate the prospectus among bond dealers; (4) answer all inquiries promptly and accurately; and (5) if not rated, investigate the possibility of becoming rated. Another pre-campaign measure is to establish lines of communication for disseminating information to the public. Mass media, public

speakers, and citizens committees utilizing graphs, charts, etc., may be used to carry the campaign to the public. A public relations program is suggested as a means for stimulating community action. Samples of speeches, brochures, graphs, blueprints, financial reports, and other campaign materials are cited in the report.

Teacher and School Board Roles

To examine the role and functions of teachers as social participants within the school and in the community, Robert B. Carson and his associates[16] analyzed questionnaire survey data from teachers and nonteachers in three western Oregon communities. General findings indicated that social participation experiences and aspirations with respect to educational activities and community life are limited for most teachers in three ways: (1) teachers believe their wide participation in such activities is inappropriate, (2) they have not participated extensively in these activities, and (3) they do not aspire toward a powerful decision making role either in education or in community life.

James M. Lipham,[17] viewing administration as a social process, conducted a three-year study of the role of the school board as an agency for resolving conflict between the school and the community. Role expectations for the school board were assessed by interviewing 1,724 citizens, 240 teachers, 183 public officials, and 90 school board members in 12 Wisconsin school districts selected on the basis of their size, wealth, nonpublic school enrollment, community controversy, and fiscal dependence-independence. Conflict resolution was assessed by observing school boards during the budget adoption process. Analysis indicated that consensus in role expectations for the school board and resolution of school board role conflict were not related either to change in financial support for the schools or to change in allocations to selected budget categories.

Merle R. Sumption's[18] book presents a view of school-community relations based on the concept of the changing school in the changing community. To develop and maintain a desirable and adequate relationship between school and community, four essential principles must be operative: (1) recognition that the school is a public enterprise, (2) understanding that the American public school has a responsibility to seek out truth and teach people to live by it, (3) realization that there must be systematic, structured, and active citizen participation in educational planning, policy making, problem solving, and evaluation, and (4) recognition that an effective two-way system of communication between school and community is needed. Ten areas are considered relative to ways a private citizen can contribute constructively and effectively to the improvement of education.

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